

What is claimed is:

1. A gaming machine comprising:

means adapted to display an array of symbols randomly selected from a set of symbols;

5 means adapted to paying winnings on an occurrence of predetermined winning combinations of symbols appearing in predetermined portions of the array, wherein the set of symbols comprises at least one wildcard which can substitute for any other symbol in the set in order to form at least one of the winning combinations; and

10 in response to a predetermined trigger event, means adapted to increase the winnings normally paid on any winning combination which is comprised of at least one wildcard.

2. A gaming machine according to claim 1 wherein the predetermined portions of the array are paylines, wherein any paylines carrying a bet and showing a winning combination is
15 a winning payline, and wherein the predetermined trigger event is a designated combination of the wildcards appearing in the array such that the winnings normally paid on any winning paylines incorporating any of the wildcards from the designated combination are increased.

3. A gaming machine according claim 1 wherein the predetermined trigger event is
20 selected relative positioning of at least two of the wildcards.

4. A gaming machine according to claim 2 wherein the designated combination must appear in the adjacent positions of the array such that the combination is then presented as a single symbol that is larger than the remaining symbols within the array.

5. A gaming machine according to claim 2 wherein the designated combination also includes symbols from the set other than the wildcard symbols.

6. A gaming machine according to claim 2 wherein all wildcard symbols have a multiplying factor, and wherein in response to a trigger event and when at least two wildcard appear in select winning paylines, the multiplying factors of the at least two wildcards are at least one of added together and multiplied together to produce a larger multiplying factor which is applied to the normal winnings of such winning payline.

7. A gaming machine according to claim 6 wherein the multiplying factors are randomly selected from a preset range.

8. A gaming machine according to claim 6 wherein the multiplying factors are related to the total number of wildcards that have appeared in the array.

9. A gaming machine according to claim 2 wherein all wildcard symbols have a multiplying factor, and wherein in response to a trigger event and when at least two wildcard appear in any winning paylines, the multiplying factors of the at least two wildcards are at least

one of added together and multiplied together to produce a larger multiplying factor which is applied to the normal winnings of the winning payline.

10. A method for operating a gaming machine comprising:

displaying an array of symbols randomly selected from a set of symbols;

paying winnings on an occurrence of predetermined winning combinations of symbols appearing in predetermined portions of the array, wherein the set of symbols comprises at least one wildcard which can substitute for any other symbol in the set in order to form at least one of the winning combinations; and

in response to a predetermined trigger event, paying winnings in addition to those normally paid on any winning combination which is comprised of at least one wildcard.

11. A method according to claim 10 wherein the predetermined portions of the array are paylines, wherein any paylines carrying a bet and showing a winning combination is a winning payline, and wherein the predetermined trigger event is a designated combination of the wildcards appearing in the array such that the winnings normally paid on any winning paylines incorporating any of the wildcards from the designated combination are increased.

12. A method according claim 10 wherein the predetermined trigger event is selected relative positioning of at least two of the wildcards.

13. A method according to claim 11 wherein the designated combination must appear in the adjacent positions of the array such that the combination is then presented as a single symbol that is larger than the remaining symbols within the array.

5 14. A method according to claim 11 wherein the designated combination also includes symbols from the set other than the wildcard symbols.

10028551.1 15. A method according to claim 11 wherein all wildcard symbols have a multiplying factor, and wherein in response to a trigger event and when at least two wildcard appear in select winning paylines, the multiplying factors of the at least two wildcards are at least one of added together and multiplied together to produce a larger multiplying factor which is applied to the normal winnings of such winning payline.

16. A method according to claim 15 wherein the multiplying factors are randomly
15 selected from a preset range.

17. A method according to claim 15 wherein the multiplying factors are related to the total number of wildcards that have appeared in the array.

20 18. A method according to claim 11 wherein all wildcard symbols have a multiplying factor, and wherein in response to a trigger event and when at least two wildcard appear in any winning paylines, the multiplying factors of the at least two wildcards are at least one of added

together and multiplied together to produce a larger multiplying factor which is applied to the normal winnings of the winning payline.